

**RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS  
SKAGIT COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
Friday, October 22, 1999**

- \*T      1:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.      Presentation of the 1999 Erin J. Johnson Foundation National Model Program Award to Skagit County's Best SELF Program.
- 2:00 p.m. – 3:00 p.m.      Meeting with Representatives from the Washington State Fish & Wildlife Department re: Skagit River Pink Salmon Issues.

The Skagit County Board of Commissioners met in regular session on Friday, October 22, 1999, with Commissioners Robert Hart and Harvey Wolden present. Commissioner Ted W. Anderson's absence was excused.

**PRESENTATION OF THE 1999 ERIN J. JOHNSON FOUNDATION NATIONAL MODEL PROGRAM AWARD TO SKAGIT COUNTY'S BEST SELF PROGRAM.**

Tawni Helms, Best SELF Program Coordinator, thanked those assembled for attending and advised that the Skagit County Best SELF Program had been named the "National Model Program of the Year for 1999" by the Erin J. Johnson Foundation.

Skye Richendryfer, Mayor of Mount Vernon, congratulated the County on receiving this prestigious award, noting that nothing done for children is ever wasted. He also thanked the Foundation for selecting the Skagit County Best SELF Program for this award.

Mike Woodmansee, County Administrator, reviewed the history of the Best SELF Program and its challenges and successes. He noted that other areas in the State have adopted similar programs to the County's Best SELF Program, and that this national recognition is rewarding. He stated that he would be making a national presentation on the program at the National Association of Counties meeting in Albuquerque, New Mexico, in November. He expressed his appreciation to the Board for their continued vision of putting money into prevention programs such as Best SELF.

Dr. J.R. Johnson, Chairperson of the Selection Committee for the Erin J. Johnson Foundation, stated that he is a long-time advocate for youth, and spoke regarding the recognition of the Best SELF Program as the National Model Program for 1999.

Dr. Johnson reviewed the establishment of the Erin J. Johnson Foundation in 1994 following the death of a child. He stated that the intent of the Foundation is to assist youngsters in need, working with schools and other agencies. He stated that the Foundation decided to select a National Model program each year that addresses the needs of children, is replicable, and that is significantly beneficial to children. He stated that the program must address the needs of at-risk children, but be available to all children. He reviewed the specifics of the McComb Healthy Schools Program in McComb, Mississippi, a previous award winner.

Dr. Johnson stated that all of the state governors are sent information about the Model Program award winner, and information is presented at national conferences and on national television. He stated that it is hoped that the Board will continue supporting this project and continue participation. He also urged the creative minds that brought the program together to continue in their process of making the program better for everyone across the country. He stated that it is hoped that the Best SELF Program can be replicated throughout the nation where similar problems exist.

Commemorative plaques were presented to the involved school districts, agencies, and others involved with the Best SELF Program.

## RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS

Friday, October 22, 1999

Page #2

### MEETING WITH REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE WASHINGTON STATE FISH & WILDLIFE DEPARTMENT RE: SKAGIT RIVER PINK SALMON ISSUES.

Commissioner Hart thanked the Washington State Fish & Wildlife Department for coming to meet with the Board.

Dr. Jeff Koenings, Director of the Department of Fish & Wildlife (DFW), introduced those in attendance, and indicated that he wanted to set the stage of what the processes were and the biological reasons for the decisions that were made.

Pat Patillo of DFW reviewed basic facts surrounding management of the Skagit River pink salmon run. He explained that before the fish arrive, DFW must have plans which require them to estimate or forecast how many fish might be returning. He stated that once the season begins, it is hoped that the strategies will match the predictions. Sometimes corrections are needed. He stated that post-season DFW tries to summarize what actually did happen. This year's information is not yet complete, but DFW does have estimates of the pink salmon run.

Mr. Patillo stated that it is DFW's goal to protect pink salmon, allowing a large number of the fish to spawn. He reviewed that the pink salmon do not return each year, only on odd years. He stated that the history since 1973 was reviewed and there were years in the past when the run contained in excess of 1,000,000 fish. He stated that it was agreed that 330,000 fish was the target number for returning fish, and that numbers in excess of 330,000 would allow a harvest opportunity. DFW predicted that less than 330,000 fish would return, establishing an estimate at 80,000 fish, explained by low spawning numbers in 1997. With only 80,000 returning pink salmon, DFW had an obligation to prepare the public for the possibility of closed or reduced fisheries. These possibilities were discussed in public meetings and with tribes and technical staffs. He reviewed the specifics of the various closures that resulted and the test fisheries performed. This information was compared with historical information, and the spawning escapement goal. The decision by the State and tribes collectively was that the pink salmon run was not in excess of the 330,000 minimum, even though the run was somewhat greater than the pre-season forecast. There were catches by the tribes of approximately 30,000 fish. Mr. Patillo stated that this situation was not atypical of other fishery management in Puget Sound, in trying to set regulations well in advance for sport fishery management. He explained the difference between sport fishing seasons and commercial fisheries, which are often managed on the last day prior to an opening. He discussed the difficulties of in-season management when everyone can look in the river and see fish, and then not be allowed to fish. He reviewed the difficulty in conveying to the public the utilization of best available science. He stated that DFW was well aware of the public's reaction, as their phones were ringing off the hook, and numerous letters and e-mail messages were received. He spoke on the issue of public communication and the difficulty in getting people to attend the public meetings held in the Spring. He stated that, in his opinion, the people who attended those meetings were well aware that the pink salmon fishery would be closed.

Commissioner Wolden asked about the use of sonar on the bridge in Sedro Woolley. He spoke to the fish passage projects done in Skagit County, and other enhancement efforts for fisheries on the Skagit River. He decried killing 30,000 fish without knowing the number of fish there were for escapement. He suggested using the best available tools for determining a correct fish count. Commissioner Wolden suggested that the season could have been opened for Labor Day Weekend, which would have restored the community's confidence in DFW's leadership. He suggested that DFW in the future needs to partner with the local community when making these types of decisions.

Commissioner Hart commented on the severe economic impact of the pink salmon closure, and concurred with Commissioner Wolden's remarks that the season could have been opened for the Labor Day Weekend to help ease such impacts. He spoke regarding his meetings with the tribes and their indication that there were a significant amount of spawning salmon. He commented on the need for a better way of measuring so a response can be formulated in a short period of time.

Commissioner Wolden questioned why a test fishery was instituted when such low numbers of returning salmon were predicted.

## RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS

Friday, October 22, 1999

Page #3

Dr. Koenings stated that DFW can better manage on the margin if they have the proper information, with the overall goal to make sure that the run comes back year after year. He noted the need to take a precautionary approach. The result is the initiation of the Endangered Species Act (ESA), when not enough care is taken to put the correct number of fish on the spawning grounds. Dr. Koenings indicated that once there is a harvestable surplus, the numbers could be restored and allocated. He stated that DFW recognizes that there should have been a better test fishery. He stated that the test fishery was still too close to the margin to open the sport season, and this was a management decision based on the science available.

Commissioner Hart spoke regarding public access sites, and the dependence on license fees. He stated that DFW cannot have test fisheries unless they develop another funding source other than from sport fishing licenses. He stated that at some point, the people of the State are going to have to address ESA, and put up hard dollars to develop programs and buy equipment to make these closure determinations more accurate.

Commissioner Wolden commented that the entire funding for salmon restoration cannot be put on the backs of the sport fisherman, and noted the need to include sport fishermen as a participant in discussions, or discontinue tapping only sport fishermen for funding. He stated that the pink salmon fishery was overmanaged and did not utilize best management practices. He stated that when it comes to managing a fishery on the Skagit River, the Board should have just as much involvement as tribal members. He urged the DFW to come to Skagit County in the Spring to meet with the Board and legislators and all of the participants to develop a partnership to help alleviate the economic impact on Skagit County.

Commissioner Hart stated that most of the scientific information that Skagit County receives about fish runs comes from local tribal biologists. He commented that the more educated the public is, the easier it is for them to understand the need to invest in the future of salmon. He stressed the need to make biological information accessible to the public.

Dr. Koenings replied that DFW wants to build on the partnership with Skagit County to further the ability to convey more information to the general public. He emphasized that it will take the Board's assistance as well as the help of Legislators to focus the public's view on providing for the escapement of spawning salmon. He reiterated that if there had been a firm forecast of 330,000 returning pink salmon, there would have been a fishery in the river, but the numbers did not allow DFW to make that close of a call.

Commissioner Wolden expressed his concern that sports fisherman are being left out of the equation. He commented that the fishery is being wiped out by those who want to maintain it. He stated that there is a good possibility that a coalition of sports fisherman will take this matter to court in the future, and stated that the County would like to avoid that scenario if at all possible. He commented that there is no such thing as a perfect science.

Larry Carpenter, Chairman of the Northwest Marine Trade Association, stated that he does not disagree with the DFW's philosophy of good sound conservation. He indicated that there is one distinct flaw and that is the way the test fisheries are handled and the accountability of such. Mr. Carpenter stated that if we have to restructure the way these test fisheries are done to know that these numbers are real, it needs to be addressed. He stated that during the test fishery in Skagit Bay, a substantial amount of Chinook and Coho salmon were caught and did not show up on the fish lists from the tribes. He reiterated that the single issue to be focused on is how the test fishery is done, so that in the end there is real information to work with.

A discussion ensued regarding the test fishery, different net sizes and types, and the accountability issue.

Dave Anderson, State Representative, stated that there is much distrust of the tribal community, some unfounded. But, he understands there were Kings caught during the test fishery that were not listed on the fish reports.

Commissioner Wolden pointed out that the test fishery wiped out 10% of the spawning goal.

**RECORD OF THE PROCEEDINGS**

**Friday, October 22, 1999**

**Page #4**

Commissioner Hart acknowledged that the tribes have problems with some of their own fishermen, just like non-indian fishermen have trouble with poaching.

Dr. Koenings indicated that steps for enforcement emphasis on the Skagit River have been taken and that the DFW is trying hard to address the legitimate concerns raised by the Board. He stated that this can be accomplished only by working together.

Commissioner Wolden suggested that if another test fishery is done, DFW should enlist the assistance of Representative Dave Anderson, together with a tribal representative, to legitimize such a test fishery and take the questions out of it. He stated that when you have someone conducting the test fishery who is entitled to 50% of the total fishery, it leads to questions of accountability.

Dr. Koenings concurred with Commissioner Wolden's remarks.

Commissioner Wolden indicated that need to see more balance and fairness. He suggested a planning session with all of the parties involved, including the tribes and sport fishermen, to talk about the issue and improve the appearance of fairness.

Dr. Koenings indicated the desire of DFW to embark on a process to develop regional management plans with a clear expectation of what is going to happen by bringing all of the stakeholders together to develop a regional management plan.

A discussion ensued on the challenge to have the right meetings at the right place at the right time to have effective public communication. The involvement of all of the stakeholders was stressed by Senator Harriet Spanel, adding that co-management will help with the issue of balance.

**ADJOURNMENT.**

Commissioner Hart made a motion to adjourn the proceedings. Commissioner Wolden seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

**BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS  
SKAGIT COUNTY, WASHINGTON**

\_\_\_\_\_  
Ted W. Anderson, Chairman

\_\_\_\_\_  
Harvey Wolden, Commissioner

\_\_\_\_\_  
Robert Hart, Commissioner

ATTEST:

\_\_\_\_\_  
Patti J. Chambers, Clerk of the Board  
Skagit County Board of Commissioners